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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PRT MAYSAN: JAM AND THE TRIBES, URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Darrell Jenks for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Maysan reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: The extent of Mahdi Army influence on dense urban and sparse rural populations in Maysan remains in dispute. Most evidence points to an elected and JAM-dominated provincial government controlling Maysan, urban centers balanced against tribal leaders controlling populations in outlying, rural areas. A contingent of young, unemployed males in both urban and rural areas are aligning with Iraqi Police, militias, criminal elements posing as militias, and organized criminal elements. This complex mixture is further complicated by increasing Iranian activity in the province. End summary.

[1](#)3. (C) In discussions of the pervasiveness of the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) in Maysan Province, and its role in tribal affairs, an issue that frequently emerges is whether JAM leadership is capable of generating tribal support for Office of Muqtada al-Sadr (OMS) policy statements. Conventional wisdom on Maysan holds that tribes are weaker than JAM, and thus susceptible to the JAM-controlled provincial government.

While some observers argue that tribes are weak and manipulated by a more "sophisticated" and urban-centered JAM, others contend that JAM has no real influence outside major population centers.

[1](#)4. (C) Recent conversations with tribal sheikhs have suggested that Maysanis living in rural areas work hard to earn a living and have little time for, nor interest in, politics. At last count, sixty-five percent (509,551 residents) of Maysan's population lived in urban areas. Marsh Arabs (Ma'dan) are returning from life in Baghdad, but resettling in cities or towns instead of their families' farms or marshlands. The legitimately-elected provincial government is pulled from the ranks of an irregular militia. Urban areas are overcrowded and dominated by militarized religious stakeholders and independent or organized criminal elements. All these elements, coupled with high unemployment for unskilled, unmarried young males form a backdrop for repression of the urban population.

[1](#)5. (C) To further complicate the urban-rural dynamic, Iran has asserted itself through its agents and proxies. Its actors use Maysan as a point of entry, a staging area, and a foothold in Iraq and contend for power with existing provincial power players. Iran has difficulty gaining genuine support beyond acceptance of money and training. Reports of a vote-buying scheme illustrate concerns that Iran plans to promote Islamic parties and candidates and exclude independent candidates in the upcoming elections.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: By most counts, JAM is in control of Maysan, dense population centers while, with the exception of young, unemployed men, tribal sheiks control the thinner outlying populations. Tribal leaders are more likely to follow the teachings and proclamations of the Grand Ayatollah

al-Sistani, while a JAM-dominated urban population is more likely to support provincial JAM representatives and government officials. Further, Iran is establishing a foothold in the province. It is likely, though, that Maysani leadership, both urban and rural, is more interested in Iranian tangibles, including money, training, and community projects, than submitting to dictates from Tehran. End Comment.  
CROCKER